

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 86 — God of Grace

1.0 Introducing Psalm 86

- Psalm 86 is a Davidic psalm—the first one since Psalm 70 and the only one in Book 3 (Psalms 73–89).
- It is the second psalm titled “A Prayer of David” (cf. Psalms 17; 72:20, “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended”). Cp. Psalm 90 and Habakkuk 3.
- By its chiasmic structure, Psalm 86 “accents the themes of God’s love, the psalmist’s need for God’s help, and the praiseworthiness of God. The structurally highlighted central unit is a prayer for guidance and help”—David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 183.
- Psalm 86 contains many phrases echoing other Old Testament passages.

2.0 Reading Psalm 86 (NAU)

86:1 A Prayer of David.

Incline Your ear, O LORD, *and* answer me;

For I am afflicted and needy.

86:2 Preserve my soul,
O You my God, save Your servant who trusts in You.

86:3 Be gracious to me, O Lord,

For to You I cry all day long.

86:4 Make glad the soul of Your servant,

For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

86:5 For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive,
And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.

86:6 Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
And give heed to the voice of my supplications!

86:7 In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You,

For You will answer me.

86:8 There is no one like You among the gods, O Lord,
Nor are there any works like Yours.

86:9 All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You,
O Lord,
And they shall glorify Your name.

86:10 For You are great and do wondrous deeds;
You alone are God.

86:11 Teach me Your way, O LORD;
I will walk in Your truth;
Unite my heart to fear Your name.

86:12 I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
And will glorify Your name forever.

86:13 For Your lovingkindness toward me is great,
And You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

86:14 O God, arrogant men have risen up against me,
And a band of violent men have sought my life,
And they have not set You before them.

86:15 But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.

86:16 Turn to me, and be gracious to me;
Oh grant Your strength to Your servant,
And save the son of Your handmaid.

86:17 Show me a sign for good,
That those who hate me may see *it* and be ashamed,
Because You, O LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 86

3.1 Outline

- A. Introductory Plea for Help (vv. 1-4)
- B. God's Love—When Facing Times of Trouble (vv. 5-7)
 - C. Praise (vv. 8-10)
 - D. Prayer for Guidance and Help (v. 11)
 - C'. Praise (vv. 12-13)
- B'. God's Love—When Facing Ruthless Enemies (vv. 14-15)
- A'. Concluding Plea for God to Be Gracious (vv. 16-17)

—Dorsey, *Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 184



3.2 Notes



- **v. 1 “Incline Your ear”**
 - David brings fifteen petitions (imperatives) before the Lord in this psalm.
 - In summary, the basic petition is that God would be gracious to the psalmist.
- **v. 1 “For I am afflicted and needy”**
 - Eight times David gives reasons for his petitions.
 - “Afflicted and needy” is a set phrase regarding the state of dependence — a disavowal of self-sufficiency.
 - ✓ See Psalms 35:10; 37:14; 40:17; 109:16, 22.
 - These are the people whose distresses drive them to rely on the Lord alone for everything they need, because they have nothing in themselves.
- **v. 2 “for I am a godly man”—cf. Psalm 85:8.**
- **v. 2 “O You”**
 - David uses the emphatic second person personal pronoun six times in this psalm (verses 2, 5, 10 [2x], 15, 17).
 - The psalm focuses on God more than on the distressed psalmist.
- **v. 3 “Be gracious to me”**
 - Although it might be said that Psalm 86 is about God being merciful, it is more correctly about His grace.
 - The Hebrew root *ḥanan* (as in **Hannah** or **Johanan**) appears four times (verses 3, 6 [“supplications”], 15, 16).
- **v. 3 “O Lord”**
 - “Lord” (*’Adonai*), meaning “Master” or “Sovereign,” occurs seven times in this psalm (verses 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 15).
 - ✓ Note David’s references to himself as the Lord’s “servant/slave” (verses 2, 4, 16).
 - “LORD” (*Yahweh*), referring to the covenant God Who has a relationship to His people, occurs four times in this psalm (verses 1, 6, 11, 17). Putting those occurrences together with “name” (verses 9, 11, 12) results in a total of seven.
- **v. 5 “You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive”**
 - God’s character is defined as “good,” “ready to forgive,” and “abundant in loyal love”—a triad of beneficial attributes.
 - Compare a similar declaration in Exodus 34:6-7, a text cited more directly in verse 15 of this psalm.
 - This is an example of biblical intertextuality—the Old Testament quoting itself.

- **v. 8** “There is no one like You”
 - See Exodus 8:10; 9:14; 15:11.
 - See, also, 2 Samuel 7:22 (David praying); Isaiah 45:5-6, 22; Jeremiah 10:6-7.
- **v. 8** “Nor are there any works like Yours”—cf. Deuteronomy 3:24.
- **v. 9** “All nations”
 - God’s purpose is to bring all peoples to Himself and to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.
 - See Psalms 22:27; 66:4; Revelation 15:4.
- **v. 10** “You are great and do wondrous deeds”
 - See Psalms 71:17; 77:11-14; cp. 1 Peter 2:9.
- **v. 11** “Teach me Your way”
 - In verse 11 we find “a prayer about forming the right habits (note the end in view in the middle line), rather than making the right moves . . .”—Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73 – 150*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 312.
 - See Exodus 18:19-20; 33:12-14; Psalms 25:4-5; 27:11; 119:26, 33; 143:8.
- **v. 11** “walk in Your truth”
 - This metaphor refers to being faithful to the Lord.
 - See the previous note.
- **v. 11** “Unite my heart”
 - Reference here is to an undivided heart—a heart that is completely loyal.
 - See Psalm 12:2; Jeremiah 24:7; 32:39; Ezekiel 11:19.
 - See James 1:7-8 and 4:8.
- **v. 11** “to fear Your name”
 - Fearing God means to possess a deep abiding reverence and awe of Him. It is evidence of true wisdom (cp. Proverbs 1:7).
 - True, biblical wisdom consists of *right thinking* joined with *right believing*, resulting in *right living*.
- **v. 13** “You have delivered”
 - Since the crisis in the psalmist’s life is still unresolved, this must be a future deliverance.
 - Hebrew verbs do not inherently contain the concept of time (past, present, future). Time is a function gained from the context alone.
 - Deliverance from Sheol would seem to indicate the future deliverance from the presence of sin.



- **v. 14** “arrogant men . . . a band of violent men”
 - In this profile of David’s enemies they “appear as extremely self-confident, arrogant, and cold-blooded, have no compassion, are not repelled by psychic, social, or brute force, and literally walk over corpses.”—Erich Zenger, “Psalm 86,” in *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100*, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, trans. by Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 375.
 - See Psalm 54:3-5.
- **v. 16** “the son of Your handmaid”
 - Not only is David the Lord’s slave, he is a second generation slave—an idiom indicating that he was born within the household, not an outsider.
 - See Psalm 116:16. Compare 1 Samuel 1:11.
- **v. 17** “Show me a sign”
 - David asks for some evidence of God’s loving care, His loyalty to His servant.
 - Such evidence is not for David’s benefit alone, but for his enemies: “That those who hate me may see *it* and be ashamed.”

4.0 Singing Psalm 86

Bow Down Thine Ear, O Lord, and Hear

Tune:



- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, and hear,
For I am poor and great my need;
Preserve my soul, for Thee I fear;
O God, Thy trusting servant heed. | 2 O Lord, be merciful to me,
For all the day to Thee I cry;
Rejoice Thy servant, for to Thee
I lift my soul, O Lord most high. |
| 3 For Thou, O Lord, art good and kind,
And ready to forgive Thou art;
Abundant mercy they shall find
Who call on Thee with all their heart. | 4 O Lord, incline Thine ear to me,
My voice of supplication heed;
In trouble I will cry to Thee,
For Thou wilt answer when I plead. |
| 5 There is no God but Thee alone,
Nor works like Thine, O Lord most high;
All nations shall surround Thy throne
And their Creator glorify. | 6 In all Thy deeds how great Thou art!
Thou one true God, Thy way make clear;
Teach me with undivided heart
To trust Thy truth, Thy Name to fear. |

— *The Psalter*, 1912

5.0 Praying Psalm 86

- Lord, I am totally dependent upon You. [v. 1]
- You alone are my God—I trust in You and only You. [v. 2]
- O God, You are good, forgiving, and faithful to me. [v. 5]
- Lord, teach me how to walk in Your ways. [v. 11]
- Give me an undivided heart of faith and allegiance to You. [v. 11]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 86

- We need God's grace in order to have a right relationship to Him.
- Our God can and will answer our prayers.
- Total submission to the Lord is the foundation of true hope.

Our experience confirms us in the belief that Jehovah the living God really does aid those who call upon him, and therefore we pray and mean to pray, not because we are so fascinated by prayer that for its own sake we would continue in it if it proved to be mere folly and superstition, as vain philosophers assert; but because we really, indeed, and of a truth, find it to be a practical and effectual means of obtaining help from God in the hour of need. There can be no reason for praying if there be no expectation of the Lord's answering.

— C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols.
(reprinted; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 2/1:465

